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DE RUEHLA #0053 2011431
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 201431Z JUL 07
FM AMCONSUL BARCELONA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0867
INFO RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID 0831
RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RUEHLA/AMCONSUL BARCELONA 1031

UNCLAS BARCELONA 000053

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPT. FOR EUR/WE (CLEMENTS/CERVETTI)

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [SP](#)

SUBJECT: EX-FM PIQUE STEPS DOWN AS REGIONAL PP LEADER

Sensitive But Unclassified. Please handle appropriately.

11. (SBU) Former Foreign Minister and Catalan Popular Party (PPC) leader Josep Pique resigned with immediate effect July 19, claiming mistreatment by the national PP. In a letter to PP President Mariano Rajoy, Pique said that it had become impossible for him to continue working for the party after national leaders unleashed a series of stinging attacks against Catalan regional issues such as the negotiations over implementation of the Statute (Estatute) governing relations between Catalonia and Madrid. The last straw came July 18 when PP Secgen Angel Acebes traveled to Barcelona and, according to reports, dictated a local party shake up that left Pique and his deputies out in the cold. Daniel Sirera, Xavier Garcia Albiol, and failed mayoral candidate Alberto Fernandez all appear poised to vie for the party leadership position.

12. (SBU) Comment: The PP has never been much of a factor in Catalonia, and this recent turn of events will make things even harder for the party as it prepares for national elections probably next year. The national PP has always wielded more control over its Catalan branch than the Socialist party has over its regional party, the Socialist Party of Catalonia (PSC). The PSC, for example, elects its regional leadership; the PP names theirs from Madrid. Pique, despite his parties poor showing in Catalonia is generally thought of favorably by the political class across the spectrum. His party's anti-Catalan positions notwithstanding, he has always managed to walk that fine line between supporting Catalonia's regional aspirations while also maintaining loyalty to the nation. The curtain has probably not come down on Pique's political career just yet.
End Comment.

ROBINSON